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**DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**

**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**

**RIN 0648-XE939**

**Endangered and Threatened Species; Recovery Plans**

**AGENCY:** National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Commerce.

**ACTION:** Notice of Availability; request for comments.

**SUMMARY:** We, NMFS, announce that the *Proposed Endangered Species Act (ESA) Recovery Plan for Snake River Spring/Summer Chinook Salmon and Snake River Steelhead* (Proposed Plan) is available for public review and comment. The Proposed Plan addresses the Snake River Spring/Summer Chinook Salmon (*Onchorhynchus tshawytscha*) evolutionarily significant unit (ESU), which is listed as threatened under the ESA, and the Snake River Steelhead (*Onchorhynchus mykiss*) distinct population segment (DPS), which is listed as threatened under the ESA. The geographic area covered by the Proposed Plan is the lower mainstem Snake River and its tributaries, as well as the mainstem Columbia River below its confluence with the Snake River. As required under the ESA, the Proposed Plan contains objective, measurable delisting criteria, site-specific management actions necessary to achieve the Proposed Plan's goals, and estimates of the time and cost required to implement recovery actions. We are soliciting review and comment from the public and all interested parties on the Proposed Plan.

**DATES:** We will consider and address, as appropriate, all substantive comments received during the comment period. Comments on the Proposed Plan must be received no later than 5 p.m. Pacific daylight time on [*insert date 60 days after date of publication in the FEDERAL REGISTER*].

**ADDRESSES:** Please send written comments and materials to Rosemary Furfey, National Marine Fisheries Service, 1201 N.E. Lloyd Boulevard, Suite 1100, Portland, OR 97232.

Comments may also be submitted by email to:

*nmfs\_snakeriver\_ssch\_st\_plan.wcr@noaa.gov*.

Please include "Comments on Proposed Snake River Spring/Summer Chinook Salmon and Snake River Steelhead Recovery Plan" in the subject line of the email. Comments may be submitted via facsimile (fax) to (503) 230-5441. Electronic copies of the Proposed Plan are available on the NMFS Web site at:

*[http://www.westcoast.fisheries.noaa.gov/protected\\_species/salmon\\_steelhead/recovery\\_planning\\_and\\_implementation/snake\\_river/snake\\_river\\_sp-su\\_chinook\\_steelhead.html](http://www.westcoast.fisheries.noaa.gov/protected_species/salmon_steelhead/recovery_planning_and_implementation/snake_river/snake_river_sp-su_chinook_steelhead.html)*

Persons wishing to obtain an electronic copy on CD ROM of the Proposed Plan may do so by calling Bonnie Hossack at (503) 736-4741, or by emailing a request to *mailto:bonnie.hossack@noaa.gov* with the subject line "CD ROM Request for Snake River Spring/Summer Chinook Salmon and Snake River Steelhead Recovery Plan."

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Rosemary Furfey, NMFS Snake River Spring/Summer Chinook Salmon and Steelhead Recovery Coordinator, at (503) 231-2149, or *mailto:Rosemary.Furfey@noaa.gov*.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:**

## Background

We are responsible for developing and implementing recovery plans for Pacific salmon and steelhead listed under the ESA of 1973, as amended (16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*). Recovery means that the listed species and their ecosystems are sufficiently restored, and their future secured, to the point that the protections of the ESA are no longer necessary. Section 4(f)(1) of the ESA requires that recovery plans include, to the maximum extent practicable: (1) objective, measurable criteria which, when met, would result in a determination that the species is no longer threatened or endangered; (2) site-specific management actions necessary to achieve the plan's goals; and (3) estimates of the time required and costs to implement recovery actions. The ESA requires the development of recovery plans for each listed species unless such a plan would not promote its recovery.

We believe it is essential to have local support of recovery plans by those whose activities directly affect the listed species and whose continued commitment and leadership will be needed to implement the necessary recovery actions. We, therefore, support and participate in collaborative efforts to develop recovery plans that involve state, tribal, and federal entities, local communities, and other stakeholders. For this Proposed Plan for threatened Snake River Spring/Summer Chinook Salmon and Snake River Steelhead, we worked collaboratively with state, tribal, and Federal partners to produce a recovery plan that satisfies the ESA requirements. We have determined that this *Proposed ESA Recovery Plan for Snake River Spring/Summer Chinook Salmon and Snake River Steelhead* meets the statutory requirements for a recovery plan and are proposing to adopt it as the ESA recovery plan for these threatened species. Section 4(f) of the ESA, as amended in 1988, requires that public notice and an opportunity for public

review and comment be provided prior to final approval of a recovery plan. This notice solicits comments on this Proposed Plan.

### **Development of the Proposed Plan**

For the purpose of recovery planning for the ESA-listed species of Pacific salmon and steelhead in Idaho, Oregon, and Washington, NMFS designated five geographically based “recovery domains.” The Snake River Spring/Summer Chinook Salmon ESU and Snake River Steelhead DPS spawning and rearing range is in the Snake River recovery domain of the Interior Columbia area. For each domain, NMFS appointed a team of scientists, nominated for their geographic and species expertise, to provide a solid scientific foundation for recovery plans. The technical recovery team responsible for Snake River Spring/Summer Chinook Salmon and Snake River Steelhead, the Interior Columbia Technical Recovery Team, included biologists from NMFS, other Federal agencies, states, tribes, and academic institutions.

A primary task for the Interior Columbia Technical Recovery Team was to recommend criteria for determining when each component population within an ESU or DPS should be considered viable (*i.e.*, when they have a low risk of extinction over a 100-year period) and when ESUs or DPSs have a risk of extinction consistent with no longer needing the protections of the ESA. All technical recovery teams used the same biological principles for developing their recommendations. These principles are described in the NOAA technical memorandum *Viable Salmonid Populations and the Recovery of Evolutionarily Significant Units* (McElhany *et al.*, 2000). Viable salmonid populations (VSP) are defined in terms of four parameters: abundance; productivity or growth rate; spatial structure; and diversity.

We also collaborated with state, tribal, and Federal biologists and resource managers to provide technical information used to write the Proposed Plan which is built upon locally-led recovery efforts. In addition, NMFS established a multi-state (Idaho, Oregon, and Washington), tribal, and Federal partners' regional forum called the Snake River Coordination Group that addresses the four ESA-listed Snake River salmon and steelhead species. They met twice a year to be briefed and provide technical and policy information to NMFS. We presented regular updates on the status of this Proposed Plan to the Snake River Coordination Group and posted draft chapters on NMFS' West Coast Region Snake River recovery planning web page. We also made full drafts of the Proposed Plan available for review to the state, tribal, and Federal entities with whom we collaborated to develop the plan.

For the purpose of recovery planning in the Snake River recovery domain, NMFS divided the domain into three different "management units" based on jurisdictional boundaries, as well as areas where local planning efforts were underway. The three Snake River domain management units include: the Northeast Oregon unit; Southeast Washington unit; and the Idaho unit. A recovery plan addressing tributary conditions for both species was developed for each management unit. All three management unit plans were developed in coordination with respective Federal, state, and local agencies, tribes, and others. This Proposed Plan synthesizes relevant information from the three management unit plans at the species level and includes them as appendices: Appendix A is the *Northeast Oregon Management Unit Plan*; Appendix B is the *Southeast Washington Management Unit Plan*; and Appendix C is the *Idaho Management Unit Plan*.

In addition to the Proposed Plan, we developed and incorporated the *Module for the Ocean Environment* (Fresh *et al.* 2014) as Appendix D to address Snake River Spring/Summer Chinook Salmon and Snake River Steelhead recovery needs in the Columbia River estuary, plume, and Pacific Ocean. To address recovery needs related to the Lower Columbia River mainstem and estuary, we incorporated the *Columbia River Estuary ESA Recovery Plan Module for Salmon and Steelhead* (NMFS 2011a) as Appendix E. To address recovery needs for fishery harvest management in the mainstem Snake and Columbia Rivers, Columbia River estuary, and ocean, we developed and incorporated the *S Snake River Harvest Module* (NMFS 2014a) as Appendix F. To address recovery needs related to the Columbia River Hydropower System, we developed and incorporated the *Supplemental Recovery Plan Module for Snake River Salmon and Steelhead Mainstem Columbia River Hydropower Projects* (NMFS 2014b) as Appendix G of this Proposed Plan.

The Proposed Plan, including the three management unit plans and four modules, is now available for public review and comment.

### **Contents of Proposed Plan**

The Proposed Plan contains biological background and contextual information that includes descriptions of the ESU and DPS, the planning area, and the context of the plan's development. It presents relevant information on ESU and DPS structure, guidelines for assessing salmonid population and ESU and DPS status, and a brief summary of Interior Columbia Technical Recovery Team products on population structure and species status. It also presents NMFS' proposed biological viability criteria and threats criteria for delisting each species.

The Proposed Plan also describes specific information on the following: current status of Snake River Spring/Summer Chinook Salmon and Snake River Steelhead (Chapter 4); limiting factors and threats throughout the life cycle that have contributed to each species' decline (Chapter 5); recovery strategies and actions addressing these limiting factors and threats (Chapter 6); and a proposed research, monitoring, and evaluation program for adaptive management (Chapter 7). For recovery actions, the Proposed Plan incorporates the site-specific actions in each management unit plan, together with the associated location, life stage affected and potential implementing entity. The Proposed Plan also summarizes time and costs (Chapter 8) required to implement recovery actions. In some cases, costs of implementing actions could not be determined at this time and NMFS is interested in additional information regarding scale, scope, and costs of these actions. We are also particularly interested in comments on establishing appropriate forums (Chapter 9) to coordinate implementation of the Proposed Plan. We are also interested in information to address critical uncertainties identified in the Proposed Plan, particularly regarding causes of mortality of juvenile fish as they move from natal tributaries into the Salmon and Snake Rivers during migration to the Pacific Ocean.

### **How NMFS and Others Expect to Use the Plan**

With approval of the final recovery plan, we will commit to implement the actions in the plan for which we have responsibility, authority, and funding; encourage other Federal and state agencies and tribal governments to implement recovery actions for which they have responsibility, authority, and funding; and work cooperatively with the public and local stakeholders on implementation of other actions. We expect the

recovery plan to guide us and other Federal agencies in evaluating Federal actions under ESA section 7, as well as in implementing other provisions of the ESA and other statutes. For example, the plan will provide greater biological context for evaluating the effects that a proposed action may have on a species by providing delisting criteria, information on priority areas for addressing specific limiting factors, and information on how the ESU and DPS can tolerate varying levels of risk.

When we are considering a species for delisting, the agency will examine whether the section 4(a)(1) listing factors have been addressed. To assist in this examination, we will use the delisting criteria described in section 3.4 of the Proposed Plan, which include both biological criteria and criteria addressing each of the ESA section 4(a)(1) listing factors, as well as any other relevant data and policy considerations.

We will also work with the proposed implementation structure, as described in chapter 9 of the Proposed Plan, to coordinate among existing forums, develop implementation priorities, and address science and adaptive management issues.

## **Conclusion**

Section 4(f)(1)(B) of the ESA requires that recovery plans incorporate, to the maximum extent practicable, (1) objective, measurable criteria which, when met, would result in a determination that the species is no longer threatened or endangered; (2) site-specific management actions necessary to achieve the plan's goals; and (3) estimates of the time required and costs to implement recovery actions. We conclude that the Proposed Plan meets the requirements of ESA section 4(f) and are proposing to adopt it as the *ESA Recovery Plan for Snake River Spring/Summer Chinook Salmon and Snake River Steelhead*.



## **Public Comments Solicited**

We are soliciting written comments on the Proposed Plan. All substantive comments received by the date specified above will be considered and incorporated, as appropriate, prior to our decision whether to approve the plan. While we invite comments on all aspects of the Proposed Plan, we are particularly interested in comments on addressing critical uncertainties in our knowledge about the early juvenile life stage survival from natal tributaries downstream into the Salmon and Snake Rivers, comments on the cost of recovery actions for which we have not yet determined implementation costs, and comments on establishing an appropriate implementation forums for the plan. We will issue a news release announcing the adoption and availability of the final plan. We will post on the NMFS West Coast Region Web site ([www.wcr.noaa.gov](http://www.wcr.noaa.gov)) a summary of, and responses to, the comments received, along with electronic copies of the final plan and its appendices.

## **Literature Cited**

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**Authority:** 16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*

Dated: October 21, 2016.

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